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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: SHIA ISLAMIST LEADERS REACT TO ELECTIONS

REF: BAGHDAD 5019 BAGHDAD 5010

Classified By: POL COUNS Robert S. Ford, reason 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶11. (C) SUMMARY: Reacting to the December 15 elections, prominent members of the Shia Islamist Coalition (List 555) Dr. Saad Jawad Qandeel of SCIRI, Hassan al Rubaie of the Sadr Bureau, Mohammed Ismael al-Khuzaie of the Fadhila Party expressed their confidence to PolOff and Pol/FSN. They all feel UIC 555 will win at least 100 seats in the next National Assembly. They all feel the election went rather well throughout the country, but expressed some concerns about the voting. One aide to coalition leader Abdel Aziz al-Hakim told Poloff that discussion of cabinet seat assignments had to wait for the election results. He assured Poloff, however, that Sunni Arabs and Kurds would get some seats in the next cabinet that the aide assumed would be led by the Shia Islamist Coalition. END SUMMARY.

Thus Spake SCIRI

¶12. (C) SCIRI spokesperson Saad Qandeel told PolOff in a December 15 phone interview that the election went well overall. He is confident the United Iraqi Coalition (UIC - List 555) will emerge as the largest party in the National Assembly and have at least 100 seats. He did express concern that some Iraqis who had recently moved from one city to another, particularly from Tal Afar to Karbala and Nasiriyah, were not able to vote because their names were not on the voter registries.

¶13. (C) SCIRI Chief of Staff Haitham al Husseini told PolOff in a December 15 phone interview that he thinks UIC 555 will win at least 110 seats in the National Assembly. When asked about the distribution of ministries, he said that will not be seriously discussed until after the election results are announced. Haitham added, that, despite reports to the contrary, the deal struck after the January 2005 elections in which the Prime Minister's party will not control any ministries will remain in effect. Haitham, a confidante of SCIRI leader Abdel Aziz al-Hakim, also assured PolOff that ministries would be held by Sunni Arabs as well as Shia and Kurds.

Sadrists Concerns

¶14. (C) Hassan al Rubaie, head of the Sadrists list in the UIC 555 coalition, told Pol/FSN in a December 15 phone interview that UIC 555 received many votes in Baghdad and southern Iraq. &This will prove that UIC 555 is the strongest party in Iraq.⁸ He also expressed concerns about possible fraud and the lack of ballot boxes in some areas such as Anbar province (Ref A).

Fadhila Confident

¶15. (C) Prominent Fadhila Party member Mohammed Ismael told Pol/FSN in a December 15 phone interview that, after visiting polling centers in Al Amarah, he felt the election went well. He felt UIC 555 performed very well in the Shia heartland, especially in Nasiriyah, Basrah, Al Kut, and Sadr City. He pointed to the Al Jazeera broadcast which sparked protests on December 14 (Ref B) as having helped UIC 555 win many sympathy votes among the Shia. He predicts that UIC 555 will win at least 115 seats in the National Assembly.

¶16. (C) COMMENT: These UIC 555 members are all confident that their party will win the largest number of seats in the National Assembly. It remains to be seen to what extent they will share power - these Shia Islamists are still not sure how well they scored. Moreover, they talked a good game about bringing in Sunni Arabs and Kurds, but they were tough in screening Sunni Arabs into the transitional government cabinet in the spring of 2005. That said, our first soundings from among the Islamist ranks at least carry the right tone. END COMMENT.

KHALILZAD